



State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations
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NEWS RELEASE

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“Bullying is wrong – no matter who the victim is” RIDE Holds Anti-Bullying Forum Focused on Issues of Sexual Orientation

Directly addressing incidents of bullying based in issues of sexual orientation at schools and campuses, Education Commissioner Deborah A. Gist told those gathered at an anti-bullying forum that “bullying is wrong, no matter who the victim is: it’s bad for kids, it’s bad for adults, it’s bad for schools.”

Gist and others spoke today (November 8, 2010) to several hundred people who gathered at the Providence Career and Technical Academy for a Department of Education (RIDE) anti-bullying forum focused on issues of sexual orientation.

In welcoming participants to the forum, Robert G. Flanders, Jr., Esq., Chairman of the Board of Regents, said: “All of our educators are responsible for providing supports and resources to students, for intervening every time they witness bullying, and for ensuring that a safe school environment for their students. Making schools safe for all youth, regardless of sexual orientation, makes school safe places for teaching and learning.”

“We all need to assess our own values and beliefs around bullying, related to many different issues: religion, race, disability, special needs, or appearance,” Commissioner Gist noted. “People are typically bullied for being different in some way – tall, short, brown skin, white skin, curly hair, straight hair, a disability, an accent or having a unique style. We must create school cultures that ideally celebrate – or at the *very* minimum tolerate – the differences among us.”

Commissioner Gist discussed steps RIDE is taking to provide training to all educators regarding bullying issues and sexual orientation and to collect data on school safety.

The forum was designed to provide educators and other community members with current information on issues related to bullying, particularly of youth who identify themselves as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer.

NBC 10 reporters Mario Hilario and Patrice Wood moderated the forum. NBC 10 also established a Call 10 phone bank, staffed by social workers and school counselors, for viewers with questions or concerns about bullying issues. Other participants included Sen. John J. Tassoni, Jr.; Lawrence P. Filippelli, Ed.D., of the Scituate Schools; Karen Izzo, of East Greenwich High School; James Robinson and Rory Mann, of Youth Pride, Inc.; Deborah Grossman-Garber, of the Office of Higher Education; and Jan Mermin, of RIDE.

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